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ABSTRACT

A unit in assertive communication strategies for the workplace was developed and tested with approximately 45 juniors and seniors at a Utah high school. For 4 weeks of a 6-week grading period, the students were exposed to basic information on verbal and nonverbal communication and administered a survey designed to tap their individual value system regarding sensitivity to others, interpersonal skills, and personal worth. Next, the students were asked to read a magazine article on emotional intelligence, view a video on empowering others, and read excerpts from a book on assertiveness strategies to implement in the face of peer pressure and/or social criticism. After they had been introduced to such techniques as fogging, negative assertion, negative inquiry, workable compromise, positive assertion, and self-disclosure, the students were asked to apply the techniques to sample dialogues between two fictional characters from novels they had previously read in class. The unit's final writing assignment was to create original dialogue using assertiveness techniques in a workplace scenario. Feedback from the students throughout the units, tests, and written assignments was very positive and enthusiastic. (Contains 10 references. Appended are sample evaluation responses from students who took the course and the course examination.) (MN)

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Peer Teaching Assertive Communication Strategies For The Workplace

American Vocational Association National Convention
New Orleans, Louisiana
December 11, 1998

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**PEER TEACHING ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
FOR THE WORKPLACE**

**American Vocational Association National Convention
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**Logan City School District
101 West Center Street
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PEER TEACHING ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR THE WORKPLACE

JUSTIFICATION

Recent research studies indicate that business and industry more and more are looking for and hiring employees with "people skills", the ability to work collaboratively and cooperatively in the workplace to enhance the work environment, networking with colleagues, and problem solving on site.¹ Thus, teaching students to be team players, tolerant of others, good listeners, and assertive communicators prepares them to deal with the stress and complexity of the workplaces of the future. Many students are not equipped with appropriate communication skills to succeed in the workplace. Results of a survey at our school indicate that most students confuse assertiveness with aggression. They mistakenly believe that only two modes exist for interpersonal relations--passive or hostile. Most students do not understand, let alone apply, assertiveness in their lives. They often experience failure in school, at home, with friends, and on the job due to poor communications and inept interactions.

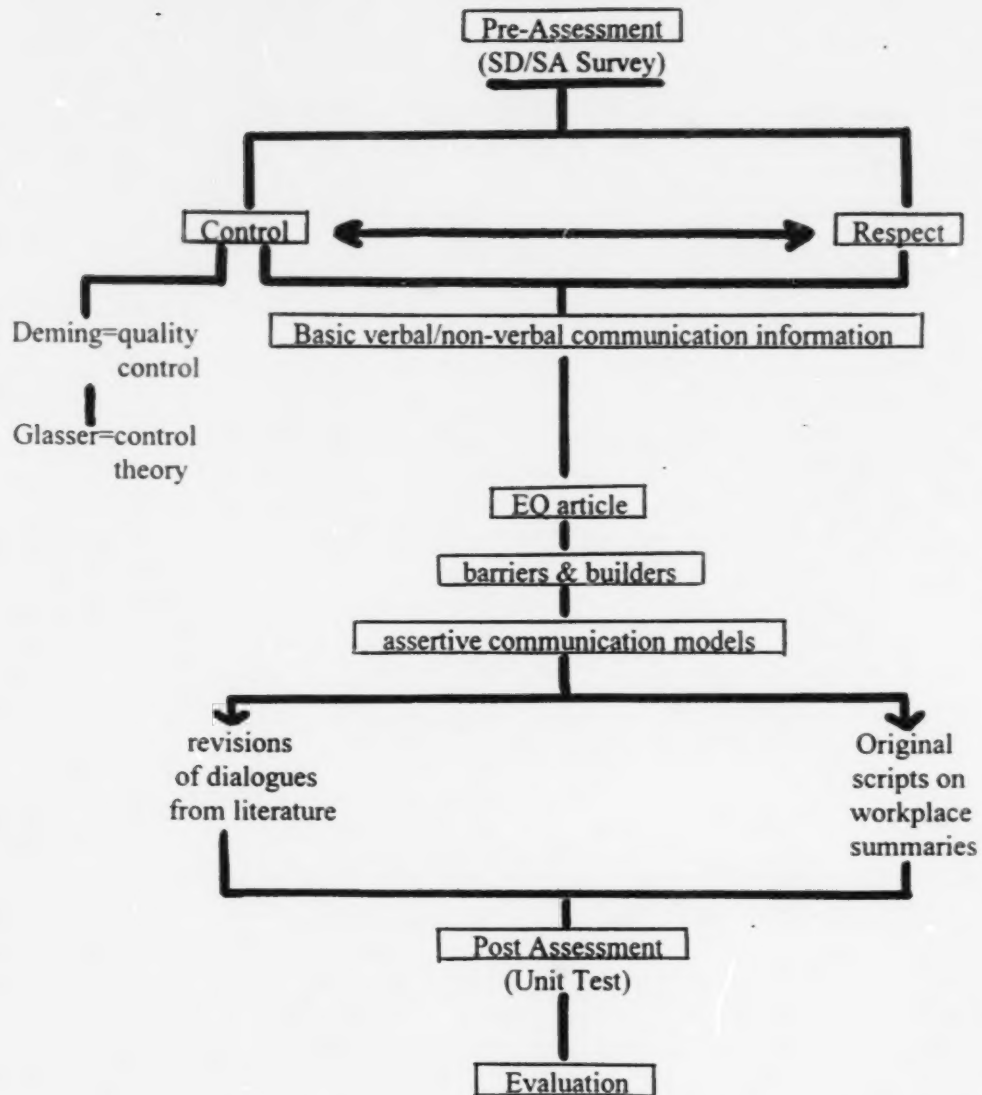
Pedagogically, peer teaching is the practice of students teaching students. The old adage that you really learn something when you have to teach it to someone else rings true. In his textbook Teaching Students to Teach Themselves², Crawford W. Lindsey, Jr. argues that ... "each of the many thinking skills uses the brain differently but always in an interactive, complementary, and reinforcing way. There has to be a teaching method to get all these skills working, practicing, performing and growing. There has to be a method that creates a situation in which every person is continually thinking and working in a socially interactive setting. Depersonalization is not one of the ultimate objectives of the public school system. Instead, the acclaimed objectives are those that will produce self-actualized, curious, adventurous, sharing, communicating, socially responsible, globally aware, and intelligent human beings". He suggests peer teaching as an effective tool towards that end. In keeping with the concept of assertiveness as empowerment, peer teaching is an excellent way to implement the related aspects of building self-esteem and reinforcing critical thinking applications.

Taking the assertive communication strategies unit on the road to the mainstream high school Teen Living and Life Skills classes affords at-risk students the hands-on application of theory and concepts in a real-world setting and contributes to their feelings of being productive members of society. They are empowered with useful knowledge of skills that will help others. Feeling connected and enabling others to better succeed, these students are the decision-makers in a group of their peers; they are the leaders empowered with knowledge other trained professional teachers deem valuable and necessary to their curriculum and their students' needs in preparation for the workplace of the 21st century.

1 (Gibbs, N. (1995, October) The EQ Factor. *Time* (pp.60-68)).

2 (Lindsey, Crawford, Jr., Teaching Students to Teach Themselves, Nichols Publishing, New York, 1988 (pp.vi,1)).

Assertiveness in the Workplace Curriculum Content



ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

IMPLEMENTATION

During the first four weeks of a six-week grading period approximately 45 eleventh and twelfth grade students were exposed to basic communication information (verbal and non-verbal) beginning with a survey designed to tap their individual value system regarding sensitivity to others, interpersonal skills, and personal worth. After silently responding to the survey individually, the four corners of the classroom were each assigned one of the survey choices: strongly agree/strongly disagree/agree somewhat/disagree somewhat. I then read out each survey item aloud to the class and asked each student to move to his/her corner that matched his/her answer. I tallied the body count for each choice on a master list and randomly questioned students about their responses. It got everyone moving and all were able to visualize the values of their classmates.

The concept of control theory as espoused by Dr. William Glasser was introduced as well as a brief mention of the work by Dr. W. Edwards Deming in the area of quality control in business and industry. Both illustrate the evolution of control as a concept tied to success in our society (e.g., control over personal choices in our lives and use of noncoercive management strategies to increase quality on the production line)

Students learned basic communication information concerning verbal and nonverbal communication based on research by various authors attesting to the fact that communication is 90% nonverbal and only 10% verbal. Different strategies were employed to illustrate this point including the following: peanut butter sandwich, geometrics, Pictionary and Taboo board games, and a sequence of transparencies entitled "action out of context".

Now that we had dealt with some personal values and were more aware of others' opinions, the class read the "EQ" (emotional intelligence) article from Time magazine and completed a lengthy worksheet on the content.

Classes viewed the video "Empowering Others" by H. Stephen Glenn in which communication barriers and builders were introduced and discussed. According to the author, people need to supplant the barriers they use in communications with builders instead:

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. assuming-----> | 1. checking it out |
| 2. rescuing-----> | 2. exploring |
| 3. directing-----> | 3. encouraging |
| 4. expecting-----> | 4. celebrating |
| 5. adultism-----> | 5. respecting |

Students applied these techniques to original samples they wrote.

Material from the book, Yes, I Can Say No by Manuel J. Smith, Ph.D. was presented as models for assertiveness strategies to implement in the face of peer pressure and/or social criticism. Techniques such as fogging, negative assertion, negative inquiry, workable compromise, positive assertion and self-disclosure were learned and applied to sample dialogues between two fictional characters from novels the students read in my classes last term which the students re-wrote in assertive style via Smith's strategies. (The novels were Ordinary People and I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings).

The seven strategies studied were:

fogging: repeating and/or agreeing a criticism ("You are stupid." "I sure could be smarter")

negative assertion: admitting a mistake ("Why are you so late?" "I know I'm late")

negative inquiry: questioning a criticism to exhaust the tormentor ("You are stupid." "What is it about me that is stupid?")

self-disclosure: revealing your own personal feelings ("You're late again!" "I'm sorry; my car wouldn't start.")

positive assertion: agreeing with a criticism using words like "yes" "you're right" "you've got my number alright!" ("You are ugly." "You're right. I am ugly.")

workable compromise: coming up with a middle ground proposal to resolve a problem or conflict ("You're late again! What's wrong with you? Can't you just get to work on time?"

"What if I call you next time when I know I'm going to be late?")

broken record: repeating your opinion in the face of opposition or manipulation ("I want to borrow your sweater. I have let you borrow my clothes before." "You have let me borrow your clothes before, but I'm not lending you my sweater.")

Their final writing assignment for this unit was to create at least 30 lines of original dialogue using assertive communications in the workplace scenario. Students could incorporate also any of H. Stephen Glenn's barriers and builders techniques also. Students performed their original assertiveness in the workplace scenes in front of the whole class.

A final test was administered in which students had access to all their notes and resources for answers and a written response to an evaluation of the content was submitted by each student. (See attached sample evaluation responses)

CONCLUSIONS

Feedback from students throughout the unit, on the tests, and in their written evaluations of the unit has been very positive and enthusiastic. The content was viewed overall to be helpful and necessary and several students remarked how cool it was that we were learning about this sort of personally useful and practical communication that everyone needs daily to cope with others.

Approaching the unit from the personal safety zone of the survey was productive because it opened the students to a tone of respect for their individual differences, listening to those differences, and looking at the numbers in the tallies as opposed to specific personalities espousing specific opinions.

Glasser's control theory provided an appropriate vehicle for the students' embracing assertiveness because of his basic needs component. Although it's just a theory, it gives students a handle on the psychology behind their motivations for the choices they make and presents the notion that we are all responsible for our own decisions---nobody makes us do or say anything we haven't decided to do or say.

The idea of control as a means of gaining respect from others being the basis of assertiveness caused students to pause and think about how they themselves communicate and interact at home, at school and with friends. Manipulation by others' aggressive or passive communications hooked students in to the unit.

The EQ article enlightened students to the concept of emotional intelligence and addressed the very real need that exists in the work world for employees with people skills. The games such as Taboo, and activities like the geometrics or action out of context transparencies reinforced the need for assertive communication skills and precision in language. The barriers and builders presented by H. Stephen Glenn in his video, "Empowering Others" and the assertive response models from Manuel J. Smith's book Yes I Can Say No enlightened the classes with strategies for putting assertiveness into practice. Students worked assiduously on their writing assignments sharing examples and ideas with each other and frequently checking with me for accuracy in their original scripts.

After the unit of instruction was taught at South Campus, ten of the twenty students were eligible and agreed to peer-teach this same unit at the mainstream high school to a Teen Living and Life Skills class there, composed of sophomores. Those who did not to participate, remained in the classroom at South Campus working on a novel unit with a teacher aide in charge.

A school bus picked up the ten of us (one of the students' father had a stroke and was in a coma for the whole three weeks of this unit, and so she was unable to attend) at South Campus and drove us to and from the mainstream high school campus, Logan High, every day during second period for three weeks.

Contracts were drawn up and the participating students agreed to the terms. The peer-teachers and I planned out the lessons and divided up the tasks:

Lessons/Tasks

SD/SA survey
Deming-Glasser handout
General Communication Info
Action Out of Context
Taboo/Pictionary

EQ Factor article
Barriers and Builders video
Assertive Communication Models

Test/Evaluation

Jake Mann
Matt Olsen
Andy Lee
Rosario Reyes
Robert Morris
Brandon Hallmark
(ALL)
Melanie Hill
Brandy Cleland
Cindy Jensen
(ALL)

The peer-teachers and I wrote in our journals about the day's experience on the bus ride back to campus or during a study hall block which is built into the school day (11 AM - 11:25 AM).

RECOMMENDATIONS

We are tentatively (and enthusiastically!) planning to return to Logan High School in the spring of 1999 to peer-teach to another Teen Living and Life Skills class. Next time, however, I would not commit to five days a week for three weeks, but rather three days a week for perhaps the whole term (6 weeks) because it was much too hectic and rushed cramming this whole unit into the three weeks. Our time schedule for classes at South Campus does not jibe exactly with Logan High's, so we lost approximately 35 minutes daily out of every 70 minute period. Another glitch was assembly schedule at LHS. Whenever there was an assembly schedule there (and in the fall there are a lot of pep assemblies for the football season!) we virtually lost a class day. Also, the depth of content would be adjusted in the interest of time. A more serious problem was what happened with the remaining students of this class at South Campus with the teacher aide: 8 out of ten Fs at midterm. Everyone goofed off--the aide was unable to coax the students into doing hardly any work. That's another reason to alternate the days of the peer-teach group. Ideally, the whole class would participate, but the level of achievement of the assertive communication unit was not met by all students to qualify them as peer-teachers. Attendance had to be considered as an important factor also. Much of our population at South Campus has erratic attendance and the success of the peer-teaching experience depends on consistent and reliable attendance.

In preparing the peer-teachers, I would next time rehearse them for their assignments with a video camera and have them critique each other, then videotape them at the high school and compare and contrast the two tapes, seeking suggestions and recommendations from all the peer-teachers and me.

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APPENDIX

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APPENDIX

SAMPLE EVALUATION RESPONSES

"I feel that my attitude has changed. I feel that I don't loose (sic) my temper as fast. And using these strategies keep (sic) me calm. But make the other person upset because I'm not fighting back."

Trista Johnson

"I believe it has helped me out a little. Most of these things I already knew about except EQ. I am taking a lesson in anger management because I am aggressive most of the time or passive some of the time. I am not really assertive but have both of the others. I think if I were to become assertive it would help me out a lot."

Kevin Romney

"I often found myself using fogging, negative inquiry, and the others in conversations. I found myself talking to my mother in a more respecting way."

Jeff Behm

"The aspects of EQ (are something) I had thought about a lot this year. It was nice to know that someone wrote a book about it. I think that these aspects of life make life. It is when people become people and not just emotionally sensitive animals. It would be a nice society if everyone used the process of looking at their emotions and used them to better their own existence instead of letting their emotions control it. If you use assertiveness, it makes you have a better day."

Randy Coleman

For the entire grading period this term (4 weeks so far) we have been working on a communication unit focusing on EMPOWERMENT (CONTROL) VIA THE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STYLE CALLED ASSERTIVENESS.

Closely related to empowerment is the concept of emotional intelligence which emphasizes that there is another way to measure intelligence and that is to assess one's "people skills" (e.g., one's ability to get along with others, resolve conflict nonviolently, collaborate with others on problem solving, and network with others to brainstorm ideas).

1. Did this overall unit help you learn new and useful information about communicating effectively? (Please explain your answer in 7-10 sentences)

2. Which parts of the unit provided the best (most useful/helpful) information for you personally as far as your own communication skills?

Rank order 1-9 (1=best 9=least helpful)

the 4 corners survey (SA/SD/AS/DS survey)

EQ

barriers/builders video

Taboo game

passive/aggressive/assertive definitions/scenarios

action out of context transparencies

assertive strategies (neg. assertion/fogging,etc...)

re-writes of dialogues from novel

original script on assertiveness at work

Explain your top 3 choices (3-4 sentences for each)

3. Did any of the information in this unit cause you to re-think your own communication style in dealing with certain people? Explain.

4. Did you enjoy this unit? Explain.

5. Was the unit too long?

6. Was the unit too boring?

7. Would you rather do this type of unit than a literature unit (novel, discussion, study guide, lab paper, etc...)? Explain.

8. Tell me one thing that genuinely makes you happy and why.

9. It seems to me that there is an enormous amount of sadness in people's lives. There's death and disease, emotional distress in families, dysfunctional family interactions due to our inability to communicate effectively, etc... Then we carry that sadness with us out into the world where we feel more alone and isolated and unable to get respected as individuals.

Perform one random act of kindness today...maybe say one kind thing to someone you normally ignore or dislike...

Peace.

1. Control theory states that people base their choices on _____ basic needs:
(list them here:)
2. Quality control was introduced by _____ to improve Japan's productivity after WWII.
3. Quality control is a method of managing workers through _____ management strategies.
4. The author of control theory is _____.
5. EQ stands for _____.
6. Customers are telling businesses that they (the customers) place more emphasis on _____ than the credentials (college degrees, training and background) of the businesses' employees.
7. According to the article we read in class entitled "EQ", why is EQ more important and in what ways is it more important than IQ? What's the difference in meanings between EQ and IQ?
8. Explain how "character" and "self-control" are related to the concept of "EQ."
9. H. Stephen Glenn in his video "Empowering Others" claimed there were _____ and _____ that affected our interpersonal communications.
10. The three types of communication modes or styles we studied in class were:
a) _____ b) _____ c) _____

PUT THE CORRECT LETTER ANSWER FROM THE RIGHT COLUMN IN THE SPACE PROVIDED AT THE LEFT OF EACH NUMBER:

This type of communication, according to H. Stephen Glenn, indicates that you:

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| _____ 1. expect people to never change | A. checking it out |
| _____ 2. prefer to do things yourself
because others are incompetent | B. exploring |
| _____ 3. are happy for what others do
no matter how haphazardly | C. encouraging |
| _____ 4. allow others to discover ways
to improve and/or solve problems | D. celebrating |
| _____ 5. let others express their reasoning
for doing things before jumping to
conclusions | E. respecting |
| | F. assuming |
| | G. rescuing |
| | H. directing |
| | I. expecting |
| | J. adultism |

List two things (from the class notes you copied off the front board) that choosing the assertive communication style, rather than passive or aggressive, enables you to do:

1)

2)

Label the following 2 sample dialogues when examples of assertive communication strategies we learned in class are used: (as in the models xeroxed in class from the book, Yes I Can Say No)

Itchy: You are one ugly cat, Scratchy!

Scratchy: Yes, I sure am ugly.

Itchy: Your fur looks like the butt hair on a gorilla!

Scratchy: What is it about my fur that looks like butt hair?

Itchy: I guess it must be the way the flies are crawling all over it!

Scratchy: What is it about the flies crawling all over my fur that makes it look like butt hair?

Itchy: You are too ugly and stupid to talk to.

Scratchy: I sure wish you wouldn't then.

Krusty: Sideshow Bob, would you do the kiddie show for me so I can sleep in; I'm sick today.

Sideshow Bob: No way, Krusty! You get paid big bucks to appear live on TV. I only get minimum wage as your sidekick; I'm not doing the whole show myself and only get minimum wage!

Krusty: You are such a crybaby!

Sideshow Bob: Yes, I'm a real crybaby—who only makes minimum wage. I'm not doing the whole show myself.

Krusty: I haven't been very generous in paying you in the past; what if I give you a \$5 per hour raise? Will you cover for me then?

Sideshow Bob: Talk is cheap...when I see your offer in writing, witnessed by my attorney, I'll cover for you. I'm not doing the whole show myself for minimum wage.

Krusty: You're right! It'd be crazy for you to do my job for me and only get minimum wage. My offer will be on your lawyer's desk in fifteen minutes.

Sideshow Bob: I'm sorry to drive such a hard bargain, Krusty, but you are a very difficult person to have for a boss. You are so mean, shooting me out of cannons and stuff!

Krusty: I'm not the easiest boss to work for, that's for sure! I could certainly be more sensitive!

Define assertiveness based on the information given in the class notes. Refer to all definitions and attributes of assertiveness in your answer as cited in all the class notes.